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(21) International Application Number: PCT/US97/23312 (22) International Filing Date: 16 December 1997 (16.12.97) (30) Priority Data: 08/773,373                26 December 1996 (26.12.96)    US (71) Applicant: AT & T CORP. [US/US]; 32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2412 (US). (72) Inventors: MILEWSKI, Allen, E.; 96 South Street, Red Bank, NJ 07701 (US). SMITH, Thomas, M.; 812 Dixie Lane, Plainfield, NJ 07062 (US). (74) Agent: DWORETSKY, Samuel, H.; AT & T Corp., P.O. Box 4110, Middletown, NJ 07748 (US).	(81) Designated States: CA, JP, MX, European patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE).  <b>Published</b> <i>With international search report.</i> <i>Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of the receipt of amendments.</i>	

(54) Title: A COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND METHOD OF OPERATION FOR ELECTRONIC MESSAGING USING STRUCTURED RESPONSE OBJECTS AND VIRTUAL MAILBOXES

## (57) Abstract

A communications system facilitates transactions between a sender and a plurality of recipients as part of an electronic messaging system. Messaging means enable a sender to form an electronic template containing a message in the form of a structured response object for a recipient as part of a transaction between a sender and a recipient(s). Controller means receive and store the message in a virtual mailbox assigned to the transaction for access by the sender and the recipient(s). The controller means generate and send to the recipients an indicator or pointer identifying the message at an address for the virtual mailbox.

The recipient(s) use the pointer address to view the electronic message in the form of a structured object response at the virtual mailbox in the controller. The recipient may ignore or file the message or send a response to the virtual mailbox. The response or lack of response to the structured object response by the recipient(s) is tracked and recorded by the controller. The status of the transaction is updated as reflected by the structured object response(s) and summarized for display by the controller upon inquiry by the sender. A reminder of a response due to a transaction is sent by the controller to the recipient(s) when selected from the summary display by the sender. When the transaction between the sender and recipient(s) ends, for one reason or another, the electronic message is erased from the virtual mailbox.

